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YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PENITENTIARY

by W. Weinert

In the trial of five students of the Technical High School in Dresden, sentences were pronounced over the weekend. The accusation was treason against the State and the court considered the case as proved. The district attorney had asked for penalties of a total of 36 years in prison, but the court increased the sentence of two of the young accused by another 1½ years on account of the alleged "danger to society" they represent. It took the court three days of deliberation, as if the decision had been particularly difficult in this case! Actually, the trial produced nothing that had not been clear in advance: the opposition of the five students against the East German state. For a judgment of the procedure this is the cardinal issue.

The average age of the accused was 20 years. Thus they grew up and were raised under the political system of the Zone and more or less knew the practices of the SED. That these practices are not exemplary is not the fault of the students. And if it is true that these young men wanted to procure weapons and explosives with the object of preparing a forceful overthrow of the existing order in East Germany, this is merely the result of the educational work of the SED; for it has repeatedly declared that one cannot dispense with armed force for the accomplishment of political aims. It was the SED which sat in the prisoners dock in Dresden.

Even the most adroit functionaries of the DDR will find it difficult to see a threat to the state in a lone little group of "counterrevolutionary" students, unless the state is rotten through and through. And this is not the case. But this state is rotten and false through and through. Consequently, it was easy to claim that the accused students tried to materialize their plans with the help of West Berlin "underground organizations." The official report states that the arrested were guided by the West Berlin agency of the All-German Ministry and by the since-dissolved Fighting Group against Inhumanity.

Not a word of this is true. The testimony of witnesses in the trial proved that the students received neither advice, let alone weapons, from Western agencies. But anybody who is not enlightened on the methods of the East German authorities was bound to come to the conclusion on the basis of filtered trial reports that the condemned students were criminals bent on bombing bridges and that their plans included the murder of a fellow student, who wanted to leave the group, by means of "poisoned air-rifle bullets." By a conscious resort to detective story methods, the court attempted to create an uncanny atmosphere and tried to picture West Berlin as the seat of all crimes against the Soviet Zone state.

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This moved ideological considerations connected with the Soviet Zone state completely into the background. The 16-point program of the Dresden students was only casually touched upon during the trial, and in the reports of Soviet Zone trial observers for their party papers and radio stations it was suppressed. The demands of the program for the admission of West German parties in Central Germany, for a decrease in the predominance of the SED, for the dissolution of the Secret Police, and for the dissolution of the agricultural cooperatives were almost anxiously kept secret by the press reports. And there was no mention whatever of the fact that the condemned students intended mainly to adopt the Yugoslav idea of a "third road to socialism."

Apparently, the Soviet Zone state lives in constant fear of its own youth which it trains and against which it knows no other way of protecting itself than by sending them to prison if it is not satisfied with the result of their training. It would not even occur to them to blame themselves for the reasons, though it is about time for that: The 16-point program of the Dresden students is merely a continuation of other programs formulated earlier by other "counterrevolutionary" groups, by students from the universities of Halle and Leipzig, and by individuals, such as young professor Harich and the agrarian expert Vieweg.

All of these landed in prison also. The trial of the Dresden students demonstrated even more clearly than former student trials how much is resorted to in the way of subjunctives. The terms "had", "could", "would", "were", "if", "eventual", were constantly used. Even the reporters spoke of the immaturity of the accused, of irrational dreams, of half-hatched and unfermented ideas. For with the exception of a single copy of a pamphlet, deposited in a hidden place, and of a letter to a Western radio station, the Dresden students had done nothing. Nothing - but the Soviet Zone state ran wild.

On the day when the party organ "Neues Deutschland" published the sentencing of the five Dresden students to 37½ years in the penitentiary, the paper told its readers that the West German prosecuting authorities in Dortmund had made the "monstrous proposal" to condemn eleven former members of the Communist party, who continued to work for it despite its illegality, to a total of 15 years and three months in prison. And the paper had the nerve to call this a "criminal design of the Adenauer justice on Patriots." But anybody who dares to call the Dresden sentences terror judgments is an instigator and stirrer-up of the cold war, a person who tries to obstruct any kind of approach between the two German states.

The Dresden sentences are terror sentences of the grossest sort. The representatives of the Soviet Zone state responsible for them are the instigators, as is evidenced by the comparison of the trial reports

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from Dresden and Dortmund. The Communist Gustav von Wangenheim has written a "students comedy" which was performed in Dresden simultaneously with the trial. Would it be asking too much to advise him to write a "students tragedy" now based on the data from the Dresden trial? All that can be expected from the Communists who are in command in the Zone and who are trying to extend their power to West Germany are tragedies written in blood.